ON SUPPING WITH THE DEVIL: TEHERAN, 1943

The alliance of the two capitalist and one communist nations in World War Two was cemented when Churchill flew into Moscow in May, 1942. He made two further such trips in August, 1942 and October, 1944. It was an unequal relationship from the beginning. The Soviets insisted, often rudely and sarcastically, that the Anglo-Saxons should open a second front in the West in order to draw 30 to 40 German divisions away from the Eastern Front – something the British and the Americans were by no means strong enough to do as yet. (There was a premature attempt at Dieppe in 1942 which ended in disaster – more than 4000 Allied casualties, most of them Canadian.) Instead, they opened up another front in North Africa, and, recognizing the enormous importance of the Soviet-German front for the ultimate outcome of the war, they sent vast quantities of arms and supplies by convoy around the Northern Cape to Murmansk and Archangelsk – although many convoys were intercepted and destroyed by the Germans. Meanwhile, the Americans kept the British afloat with Lend-lease supplies from across the Atlantic.

The North African campaign, though often considered a "sideshow" compared to the huge battles taking place in Russia, was nevertheless important in that the victor would gain access to the oil-fields of the Middle East – Hitler was desperately in need of oil. So both sides poured large forces into the North African struggle. At first, it looked as if the German Afrika Corps under Rommel would win. But he was stopped and then defeated in two battles at El Alamein in June-October, 1942 by British and Commonwealth forces under General Bernard Montgomery.

The saints of God also played a part in this victory. As John Sandopoulos explains, in the first battle of El – Alamein (which means "place of Menas"), where there was a ruined church of St. Menas, the saint appeared in front of the German army at the head of a troop of camels exactly as depicted on a fresco in his church and terrified the invaders.[1]

There could hardly have been a more paradoxical and contradictory alliance than that between the British aristocrat and fierce anti-communist, Churchill, and the leader of the communist world revolution, Stalin. There is a Russian proverb that in certain situations one should be ready to use "even the devil and his grandma" - Stalin once quoted this to the British and American leaders.[2] But there is another, English proverb that the Anglo-Saxons could have quoted: "When you go to dinner with the devil, use a very long spoon". Unfortunately, the Anglo-Saxons tended to follow the Russian proverb more than their own, better one; for the tragic fact was that during the war, in order to drive out one demon, Hitler, they decided to enlist the aid of another, bigger demon, Stalin.

[1] Sandopoulos, "The Miracle of Saint Menas in El Alamein in 1942", https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2010/11/miracle-of-saint-menas-in-el-alamein-in.html.
[2] Jonathan Fenby, *Alliance*, London: Pocket Books, 2006, p. 160.

Thus they repeated the mistake of the good King Jehoshaphat of Judah, who was rebuked by God for allying himself with the wicked King Ahaziah, and was told: “Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the Lord has destroyed your works” (II Chronicles 20.37).

As an inevitable result, while the smaller demon was defeated, the larger one triumphed… One British sailor, who later became an Orthodox subdeacon, was on a cruiser in the Mediterranean when he heard the news of the alliance between Britain and the Soviet Union. Turning to a friend of his, he said: “Before, we were fighting for God, king and country. Now we are fighting for king and country.”[3] For, of course, in fighting alongside the devil’s Stalin, they could not be fighting for God…

Demonology occupied the war leaders from the beginning. Thus when Hitler invaded Soviet Russia in 1941, Churchill told the House of Commons that if Hitler had invaded hell, he would have found it in himself “to make a favourable reference to the devil in the House of Commons”.[4] Again, when Churchill met Stalin for the first time, in May, 1942, Stalin wished him success in Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa.

“’May God help you,’ he added.

“’God, of course, is on our side,’ Churchill said.

“’And the devil is, naturally, on mine, and through our combined efforts we shall defeat the enemy,’ Stalin chuckled.”[5]

Very funny, no doubt, coming from the devil’s chief agent on earth… But the joke obscured, while at the same time pointing to, a supremely important truth: that God and the devil can never be on the same side, and that while God may use the devil and his servants towards his ultimate, supremely good aim, no human being can attempt to be so clever without destroying himself. For the ends do *not* justify the means: if we use evil means towards a good end, the end of it all will turn out to be evil…

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Evidently, the deep meaning of this joke continued to occupy the minds of the leaders, because they returned to it at the Teheran conference in November, 1943.

“’God is on our side,’ Churchill said. ‘At least I have done my best to make Him a faithful ally.’

[3] Subdeacon Paul Inglesby, personal communication.

[4] Fenby, op. cit., p. 65.

[5] Fenby, op. cit., p. 152.

"'And the devil is on my side,' Stalin chipped in. 'Because, of course, everybody knows that the devil is a Communist and God, no doubt, is a good Conservative.'…"[6]

Nor were the Big Three averse to some straight lying and blasphemy. Thus in Moscow in October, 1944 Churchill spoke of "our three great democracies" which were "committed to the lofty ideals of freedom, human dignity and happiness" (!!!). Later, "When somebody compared the Big Three to the Holy Trinity, Stalin said Churchill must be the Holy Ghost because 'he is flying all over the place'"[7]

We must remember that Stalin had a theological training in a Tbilisi seminary, and that his mother, during the 1930s when Stalin was murdering millions, expressed regret that he had not become a priest…

Stalin was now in a much more powerful position than he had been in 1941, and so he was not afraid to point out the great gulf between Soviet Communism and British Conservatism, even hinting that the two were *not* on the same side. Churchill, of course, as an old anti-communist warrior, was well aware of this - as Roosevelt, apparently, was not. Or if Roosevelt was aware, he chose to ignore this difference, while increasingly highlighting, to Churchill's great embarrassment, the ideological differences between imperialist Britain and the supposedly anti-imperialist United States. Moreover, he had a fatal pride in his ability to do business with the communist dictator, and win him over through charm alone. As he said to Churchill in 1942: "I know you will not mind my being brutally frank when I tell you that I think I can personally handle Stalin better than either your Foreign Office or my State Department. Stalin hates the guts of all your top people. He thinks he likes me better, and I hope he will continue to do so."[8]

Jean-François Revel recounts how, during the Teheran Conference, Roosevelt "even went in for elaborate jokes that rubbed Winston Churchill's prejudices the wrong way. After three days of talks during which Stalin remained icy, the President recounted that, at last, 'Stalin smiled'. A great victory for the West! It became total when 'Stalin broke out into a deep, heavy guffaw, and for the first time in three days I saw light. I kept it up until Stalin was laughing with me, and it was then that I called him Uncle Joe.' Democracy was saved."[9]

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[6] Fenby, op, cit., p. 239. He repeated the point once more in Teheran. "Ironically," writes Niall Ferguson, "Hitler said the same about the Japanese in May 1942: 'The present conflict is one of life or death, and the essential thing is to win – and to that end we are quite ready to make an alliance with the Devil himself.'" (*The War of the World*, London: Penguin, 2007, p. 511, footnote)

[7] Fenby, op, cit., pp. 331, 333; David Reynolds, "Confidence and Curve Balls", *The New Statesman*, December 7, 2018, p. 55.

[8] Roosevelt, in Reynolds, *America: Empire of Liberty*, London: Penguin, 2010, p. 376.

[9] Revel, *How Democracies Perish*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985, p. 220.

Churchill was now in a much weaker position in relation to both Stalin and Roosevelt, being almost entirely dependent on Stalin to defeat Hitler on land, and on Roosevelt to supply his island nation with arms and food by sea. And so he was afraid to highlight *any* ideological differences between the three. In fact, by this time both Churchill and Roosevelt were well on the path towards full appeasement of the bloody dictator – an appeasement that was even worse than that of Munich, and which had a much profounder, longer and more degrading influence on the behaviour of the western democracies...

Churchill was not unaware of the comparison with Munich. As he once said to his ministers: "Poor Neville Chamberlain believed he could trust Hitler. He was wrong, but I don't think I'm wrong about Stalin."[10] He was...

This abandonment of principle was especially striking in the case of Churchill – and not only in relation to Stalin's Communism. A.N. Wilson writes perceptively: "Churchill suffered almost more than any character in British history from watching his most decisive acts have the very opposite effect of the one intended. He who so deplored communism saw Eastern Europe go communist; he, who loved the British Empire, lost the Empire; and he who throughout his peacetime political career had lambasted socialism presided over an administration which was in many ways the most socialist government Britain ever had. While Churchill directed the war he left domestic policy to his socialist colleagues Attlee and Bevin. The controlled wartime economy, rationing, propaganda newsreels, austere 'British restaurants' for food, and the tightest government control over what could be bought, sold, said, publicly worn, produced what A.J.P. Taylor called 'a country more fully socialist than anything achieved by the conscious planners of Soviet Russia'."[11]

It all began very differently, with the agreement known as the Atlantic Charter in August, 1941. Britain and America agreed then that they would seek no territorial gains in the war; that territorial gains would be in accordance with the wishes of the peoples concerned; that all peoples had the right to self-determination; that trade barriers were to be lowered; that there was to be global economic cooperation and advancement of social welfare; that the participants would work for a world free of want and fear; that the participants would work for freedom of the seas; and that there was to be disarmament of aggressor nations, and a postwar common disarmament. In September a number of other western and Asiatic nations signed up to these principles. And on January 1, 1942 the Soviet Union and China, among other countries, also signed up.[12]

The Soviets had no intention of granting self-determination to the countries they had first conquered during their alliance with the Nazis. As

[10] Reynolds, op. cit., p. 57.
[11] Wilson, *After the Victorians*, p. 403.
[12] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_Charter; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaration_by_United_Nations.

Norman Stone writes, “Churchill did not have the strength to resist Stalin, and the Americans did not have the will.”[13]

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By the Teheran Conference in November, 1943 the Allies had effectively given in. “’Now the fate of Europe is settled,’ Stalin remarked, according to Beria’s son. ‘We shall do as we like, *with the Allies’ consent*.’”[14] Or, as Churchill put it in October, 1944: “[It’s] all very one-sided. They get what they want by guile, flattery or force.”[15]

An important factor on Roosevelt’s thinking was American public opinion, whose volatility at this point vividly illustrated one of the main weaknesses of democracy. Polls revealed that as late as 1939, as Hugh Brogan writes, that Americans, “if forced to choose, would have picked fascism rather than communism, since communism waged war on private property.” However, “by 1942 the majority found no words too kind for Stalin and his armies. The switch was made easier by the comfortable delusion, assiduously propagated, that the USSR had abandoned communism. ‘Marxian thinking in Soviet Russia,’ said the *New York Times* in April 1944, ‘is out. The capitalist system, better described as the competitive system, is back.’ That granted, the architect of the Gulag archipelago, many of whose crimes had long ago been public knowledge, could be eulogized as the man who saved the capitalist world. ‘A child,’ it was said, ‘would like to sit on his lap and a dog would sidle up to him.’ The NKVD was ‘a national police similar to the FBI and the Russians, ‘one hell of a people’, were remarkably like the Americans. Communism was like Christianity, being based on the brotherhood of man; and as Douglas MacArthur commented… from Corregidor in 1942, ‘The hopes of civilization rest on the banners of the courageous Red Army.’ Hollywood leaped onto the bandwagon by issuing a tedious, fellow-travelling movie, *Mission to Moscow,* which one day would get its makers into a lot of trouble…”[16]

Roosevelt himself, who had successfully fended off charges of being a socialist dictator in the 1930s, now seemed a full convert to Stalinism. Thus already on February 20, 1943, he wrote to the Jew Zabrousky, who acted as liaison officer between himself and Stalin, that the USSR could be assured of control of most of Europe after the war with full equality with the other “tetrarchs” (Britain, America and China) in the post-war United Nations Security Council: “You can assure Stalin that the USSR will find herself on a footing of complete equality, having an equal voice with the United States and England in the direction of the said Councils (of Europe and Asia). Equally with England and the United States, she will be a member of the High Tribunal which will be created to resolve differences

[13] Stone, *The Atlantic and its Enemies*, London: Penguin, 2010, p. 5.

[14] Fenby, op. cit., p. 211. My italics (V.M.).

[15] Fenby, op. cit., p. 331.

[16] Brogan, *The Penguin History of the USA,* London: Penguin, 2019, p. 580.

between the nations, and she will take part similarly and identically in the selection, preparation, armament and command of the international forces which, under the orders of the Continental Council, will keep watch within each State to see that peace is maintained in the spirit worthy of the League of Nations. Thus these inter-State entities and their associated armies will be able to impose their decisions and to make themselves obeyed…

"We will grant the USSR access to the Mediterranean [overriding the territorial claims of Turkey]; we will accede in her wishes concerning Poland and the Baltic, and we shall require Poland to show a judicious attitude of comprehension and compromise [i.e. surrender to all Stalin's demands]; Stalin will still have a wide field for expansion in the little, unenlightened [sic!] countries of Eastern Europe – always taking into account the rights which are due to the fidelity of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia – he will completely recover the territories which have temporarily been snatched from Great Russia."[17]

The essential truth of the Zabrousky letter was confirmed by Cardinal Spellman in a book by R.I. Gannon, SJ, *The Cardinal Spellman Story*. Describing a long talk he had had with Roosevelt on September 3, 1943, he wrote: "It is planned to make an agreement among the Big Four. Accordingly the world will be divided into spheres of influence: China gets the Far East; the US the Pacific; Britain and Russia, Europe and Africa. But as Britain has predominantly colonial interests it might be assumed that Russia will predominate in Europe. Although Chiang Kai-shek will be called in on the great decisions concerning Europe, it is understood that he will have no influence on them. The same thing might become true – although to a lesser degree –for the US. He hoped, 'although it might be wishful thinking', that the Russian intervention in Europe would not be too harsh.

"*League of Nations:* The last one was no success, because the small states were allowed to intervene. The future league will consist only of the four big powers (US, Britain, Russia, China). The small states will have a consultative assembly, without right to decide or to vote. For example, at the armistice with Italy, the Greeks, Jugoslavs and French asked to be co-signers. 'We simply turned them down.' They have no right to sit in where the big ones are. Only the Russians were admitted, because they are big, strong and simply impose themselves.

"*Russia:* An interview with Stalin will be forced as soon as possible. He believes that he will be better fitted to come to an understanding with Stalin than Churchill. Churchill is too idealistic, he [Roosevelt] is a realist. So is Stalin. Therefore an understanding between them on a realistic basis is probable. The wish is, although it seems improbable, to get from Stalin a pledge not to extend Russian territory beyond a certain line. He would certainly receive: Finland, the Baltic States, the Eastern half of Poland,

[17] Roosevelt, in Count Léon de Poncins, *State Secrets*, Chulmleigh: Britons Publishing Company, 1975, pp. 77, 78.

Bessarabia. There is no point to oppose these desires of Stalin, because he has the power to get them anyhow. So better give them gracefully.

"Furthermore the population of Eastern Poland wants to become Russian [!]. Still it is absolutely not sure whether Stalin will be satisfied with these boundaries. On the remark that Russia has appointed governments of communistic character for Germany, Austria and other countries which can make a communist regime there, so that the Russians might not even need to come, he agreed that this is to be expected. Asked further, whether the Allies would not do something from their side which might offset this move in giving encouragement to the better elements, just as Russia encourages the Communists, he declared that no such move was contemplated [!!]. It is therefore probably that Communist Regimes would expand, but what can we do about it. France might eventually escape if it has a government *à la* Leon Blum. The Front Populaire would be so advanced, that eventually the Communists would accept it. On the direct questions whether Austria, Hungary and Croatia would fall under some sort of Russian protectorate, the answer was clearly yes. But he added, we should not overlook the magnificent economic achievements of Russia. Their finances are sound. It is natural that the European countries will have to undergo tremendous changes in order to adapt to Russia, but in hopes that in ten or twenty years the European influences would bring the Russians to become less barbarian.

"Be that as it may, he added, the US and Britain cannot fight the Russians..."[18]

The eventual post-war outcome in East and Central Europe, though very bad, was not quite as bad as Roosevelt envisaged. But no thanks to him! His attitude of defeatism and surrender in relation to Stalin, his plans, in spite of his democratic ideals and his acceptance of the Atlantic Charter, to surrender most of Europe to the worst despotism in human history (while trying to break up the far milder tyranny of Britain over her colonies[19]), involuntarily makes one think that he was somehow bewitched by Stalin! What is certain is that, as the American ambassador to Moscow, Averill Harriman, said: "Roosevelt never understood communism. He viewed it as a sort of extension of the New Deal."[20]

That's what comes from supping with the devil!

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[18] Spellman, in de Poncins, op. cit., pp. 89-90.
[19] Roosevelt wanted Britain to give India her independence even before the end of the war, and to give Hong Kong to China. His officials also wanted Britain to give up the system of Imperial Preference, the tariff system which protected British exports to the Empire.
[20] Revel, op. cit., pp. 219-220.